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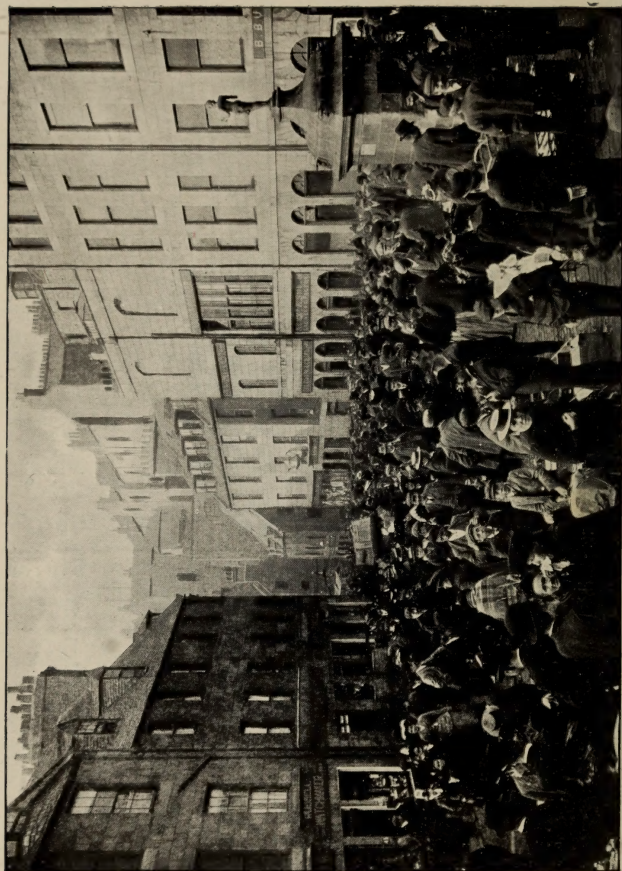
Historical

Aberdeen



The Green

21.



The Green: Looking Westward.

" Historical Aberdeen

THE GREEN AND ITS STORY"

BY

G. M. FRASER"

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ABERDEEN

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INTRODUCTORY



BERDEEN people hardly need to be told that they live in one of the most interesting, as well as one of the most beautiful cities in the country. Every one of the older streets of the burgh is the scene of early historical associations, sometimes of national interest, and it becomes both a pleasure and a duty to open out the story, in any degree, for the readers and citizens of to-day.

The purpose of this small work is to tell, in brief compass, the history of the Green quarter, and so to indicate the remarkably interesting history of the city, as a whole. The plan followed, of treating the more conspicuous features and events of the district in some detail, is a method obviously impossible in an ordinary history, where more or less summary reference must suffice; it has this advantage, however, that it enables both writer and readers to get into the atmosphere of the period, and so to appreciate more truly the life and spirit of the times. It may be regarded as, in a sense, the biography of history, in which one follows the life-story of an institution, or a street, or a district, and so

one comes to see the most familiar scenes and landmarks in a new, probably a wholly unexpected, light.

The authorities quoted show sufficiently well the sources of information. It may be hoped that the notes will prove helpful, not merely in authenticating the text, but, in some measure, in guiding readers who have not yet given special attention to the history of the city, to the best sources where they may pursue this fascinating study.

G. M. F.


November, 1904.

ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Page.</i>
THE GREEN, LOOKING WESTWARD ... (<i>Frontispiece</i>).	
THE FOUNTAIN IN THE GREEN,	8
OLD GATEWAY TO TRINITY HALL,	16
THE OLD WELL IN THE CORBIE HAUGH,	24
THE LAST "BOW" BRIG,	32
THE CASTLEGATE IN 1812,	40

THE GREEN.

I.

N one of his delightful stories Robert Louis Stevenson says there is but one side on which Edinburgh Castle can be left with either dignity or safety. For centuries this was true of Aberdeen. Visitors might, indeed, venture into it by the road leading past the Gallow-hill, or by a pathway that led from the north-west, by way of the outlying hamlet of Gilcomston; but the town had really only one entry at all worthy of the name of a public highway, and looking down now from the heights of a somewhat remarkable civic prosperity, in which the whole aspect of the city has been changed, Aberdonians may wonder at the long contentedness of the burgh with its mean and uninviting approach. Royal visits were very common in the old days, and the presence of hostile armies was not unknown; but all alike, kings and commoners, judges and clerics, friendly and invading hosts, had to find their precarious way down the Windmill Brae, across the Denburn, and along the Green to the town.

And, now, before touching on a few of the historical associations of this ancient quarter, one

may profitably glance at the appearance it presented through most part of **the** six hundred years during which the Green was the chief, practically the only, entry to Aberdeen. It can be done without inconvenience, for the outstanding maps, or plans, of the burgh are few in number, and the essential one has been so often reproduced that it is easily accessible to anyone. The earliest, and, from a historical point of view, most valuable map of Aberdeen is Parson Gordon's map of 1661.* Then we have Paterson's map of 1746,† Taylor's map of 1773, Milne's map of 1789,‡ which cover the eighteenth century; and, finally, we have the excellent map of John Smith, the City Architect, of 1810. Alongside of these we may place the current city directory map of to-day.

Now, we find from our earliest map that the Green had, in 1661, the identical shape that it possesses to-day, and we see from our other maps that it has maintained that shape throughout the period. At the date mentioned, the public highway passed citywards along the Hardgate, then destitute of houses, turned down the steep declivity which, from

*Parson Gordon's map will be found in "A Description of Both Towns," (Sp. Club); also reproduced in Rettie's "Aberdeen, Fifty Years Ago," Bulloch's "Aberdeen, Three Hundred Ago," Cadenhead's "Aberdeen Burgh Territories" (and for same paper in Philos. Soc. Trans., vol. 1.), and particularly well reproduced in Watt's "Aberdeen and Banff."

†Reproduced in Robbie's "Aberdeen: Its Traditions and History."

‡Taylor's map of 1773, and Milne's map of 1789 were admirably reprinted for the Aberdeen Town Council in 1902.

the windmill that for so many years stood near what is now the top of Crown Street, was named the Windmill Brae, to the small bridge that spanned the Denburn in the line of the wretched structure that serves to day as the public road across the railway to the Green. Then, as now, the entry into the Green was narrow, but soon the street widened out, exactly as it does still, into a triangular shape. At the Market end, as we should say, it branched off, on the left hand, into a wynd, or "vennel," leading to the Netherkirkgate, and, on the right hand, by the more public way of the Shiprow, round the southern side of St. Katharine's Hill, to the Castlegate, and so to the heart of the town.

These were the features of the Green two hundred and fifty years ago ; they are precisely the features of the Green to-day. And thereupon arises the really important question relative to this part of the city—Did it ever, within the period of human habitation, present an appearance essentially different? That is to say, was it ever in any sense a "green," or anything but a public highway? Was it ever the market square of the town, the site of the Cross, the centre of civic life, the "seat of the antient city," as one historian speaks of it? And, if not, whence the name?

It may be said at once that there is no evidence to show that it was ever either a "green," or the market place of the town—although a weekly market has certainly been held in it for many years ; further, that all available evidence goes to show that the familiar

name is a curiously perpetuated error, and the name ought to be, not the **Green**, but Green Road, or Green-gate, the way to the green, just as Castlegate is the gait, or road, to the Castle, and Gallowgate the gait to the gallows, or the Gallowhill.

Only two reasons can be given for the view that the Green was ever anything but part of the public highway—its name, and its shape. The name will have attention presently. With regard to its triangular shape, that is precisely what one would expect from the configuration of the ground. It was the highway into the town, as far as it went. But at the eastern end, and between it and the Castlegate, the forum of the burgh for seven hundred years, rose one of the three hills on which Aberdeen was built. The highway could not be carried over the top of the hill. And so it naturally widened out as it went eastward, and one arm, as already said, encircled the hill on the left side, another on the right, and thus, as shown very distinctly in our earliest map, St. Katharine's Hill stood out as a circular island round which the streets wound to pass by the Netherkirkgate, on the one side, and by the Shiprow and the Exchequer Row, at the other side of the hill, into the real marketplace of the town.

But that is not all. Among other interesting features of our map of 1661 are the six ports, or gates, of the city.* It is significant that no gate was con-

*The "gate" in this case is not to be confused, of course, with the entirely different Scotch word "gate" or "gait," meaning "way," in such words as Castle-gate, Broad-gate, etc.

structed over the narrow entrance to the Green. If it had been the market square, the "village green," so to speak, it must have been worth protecting. But the two gates in that neighbourhood were—one near the foot of the Shiprow, a short distance below Shore Brae, and the other near the foot of the Netherkirk-gate. The Green was beyond the gates. It was really a suburb, and it is a curious and illuminating fact that this designation is actually applied to it by our early historian.* Then there is no evidence to show that the Market Cross ever stood there. Documentary references to the Cross in Aberdeen carry us back to the days of Robert the Bruce, and at that time it stood, as it stands now, in the Castle-gate. From one or other of its sites in the great square the Market Cross has looked down on the busy life of the city since, at least, the early years of the fourteenth century, when John Barbour, the Arch-deacon, was yet a boy, living almost under the shadow of the Cross, and forty years before he finished his great poem depicting the life and achievements of "The Brus."† Once more, had this been really the "Green" it would have been the place of play booths and shows at some period in its history. But such has never been the case. In the days of the miracle plays, when the governors of the feasts were, in a sense,

* "All that suburbe which is now called the Green." Gordon. Both Touns, p. 9.

† In a charter, of date 1338, occurs the following:—"Ane peice land in the Castellgett of Abd. on the southe syid of the gett, passing fra the mercat croce." *Scottish Notes and Queries*, vii., p. 120.

public officials, nominated by the Magistrates, and paid a salary, modest certainly, out of the public purse, the exhibitions took place on the Porthill, or in the playfield on the Woolmanhill. In later times, when wandering troupes and shows came to supply the place of the once devotional but latterly degenerate morality plays, it was not to the Green they went but to vacant ground within the city—near the Lochlands, to Virginia Street, to the North Street, the Castle-gate, Frederick Street, or to the open space in front of St. Nicholas Churchyard now enclosed by the façade. All these things may be taken as showing that the Green never was a “green,” but something not fully explained in the name.

And, now, with regard to the name, it seems very clear that the “Green” contained in it has no reference to the class of green that has been under consideration, but to the common grazing-ground, afterwards the public bleaching-green, which ran alongside the Denburn, to which access could only be obtained by the street now known as the Green. The real secret of the name was, without his knowing it, touched in a curious way by Francis Douglas, whose “Description” of the town as it appeared in 1780 remains a most valuable contribution to our topographical knowledge of Aberdeen. Douglas tells that in passing to take a view of the lands on the south and south-west of the town

“I turned up from the Bow Bridge, and had a very pleasant walk on the Denburn. This Den is a deep and broad hollow, between two hills, which has a small

rivulet in the middle of it. Though its situation and fine shelter pointed it out as a place very capable of improvement, it lay neglected *as a piece of common pasture* till the year 1757, when the Magistrates, at a very considerable expense, made it what it now is.”*

In the early days the green by the burnside was used not merely as pasture, but by the weavers and litsters who plied their craft in the Green quarter when Aberdeen woollen goods were more celebrated in Continental markets than they are now.† And we may take it that for many a long year the mothers of the town made use of the green at the burnside before the Magistrates embarked on the remarkable improvements of 1758, which provided not only a public bleaching-green, and a public bath-house alongside of it, but planted the brae-face with the trees that were only removed in recent years to make way for the Union Terrace Gardens, and formed the Denburn itself into a pleasant stream, with a series of ornamental cascades, a very real presentment in an unexpected place of -

“The long brook falling thro’ the clov’n ravine
In cataract after cataract to the sea.”

It is certainly curious that in all our English—or Scotch—references to the street now under consideration it is invariably styled the Green, indicating that the colloquial usage, which is always wide, had

* A General Description of the East Coast. 1782. p. 143.

†In 1758, after the improvement of the Denburn, persons were forbidden, under penalty, from scouring stockings in the burn, above the Bow Brig. Council Register, LXII., p. 240.

spread beyond the limits of the grassy sward, near the stream, and from early days included the adjoining short street by which the actual green was reached. We have indeed one instance in an English deed in which the strictly accurate designation is approached. In a register in the Town House, of date 1576, mention is made of property "in the grein," followed immediately by a reference to another property "in that samen gett,"* but that is as near as we ever come in English to the proper designation of the street. On the other hand, in the Latin charters and registers, through which it is sometimes possible to obtain a glance of the real meaning of such a name when other means fail, the designation always used is the exact equivalent of the Green-gate.

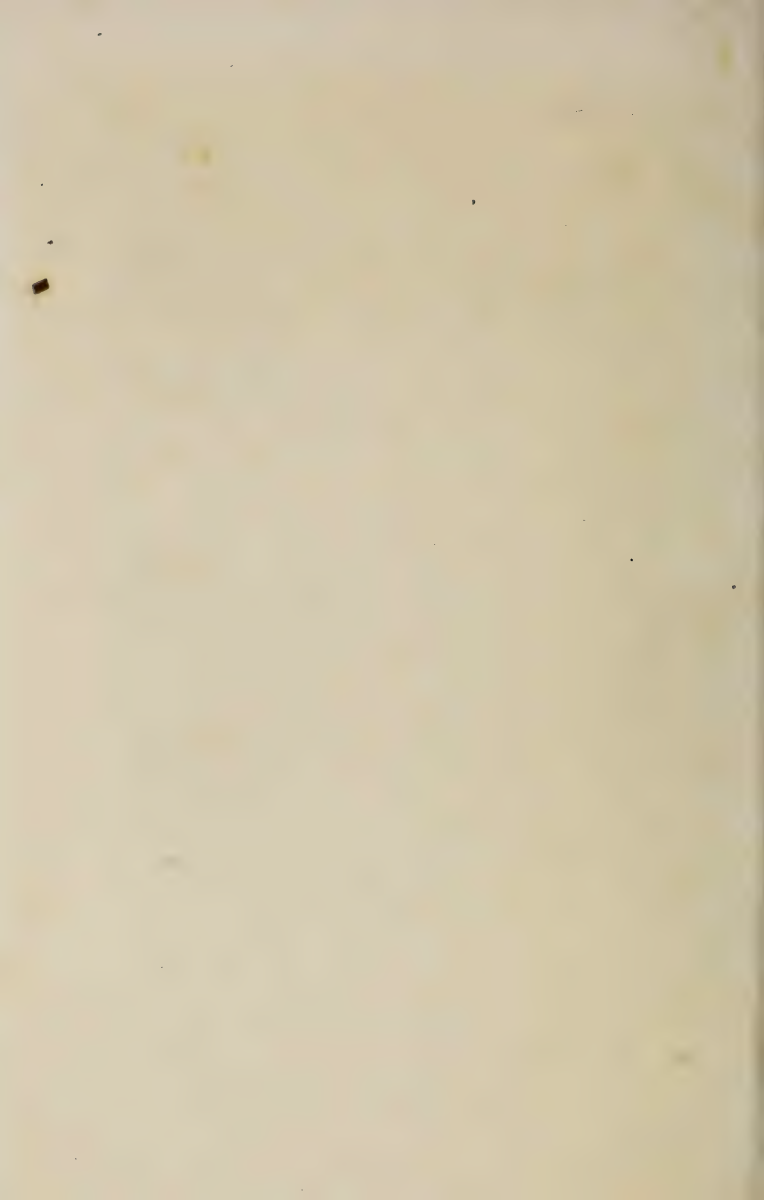
When, in those days, it was intended to refer to an actual green, or grassy space, the writers spoke of it as "*viridarium pratum*," or "*lie greine pratum*," and these are the actual designations of the space familiarly known, three centuries ago, as "the green meadow" that lay between Castle-hill and Fuddy.† But when it was intended to designate the street now known as the Green it was "*vicus viridis*," "the green road," or "*in vico viridi*," "in the green road," that is, in the road of, or to, the green—or something precisely equivalent. Thus a very early and notable reference, of date 1277-8, speaks of property belonging to the Carmelite Friars as lying "*in vico qui dicitur le grene*"

* Chartulary of St. Nicholas, II., p. 285.

† Anderson. Charters and Other Writs, pp. 161, 171.



The Fountain in the Green.



—"in the street which is called the Green";* and we have another example, of 1439, showing traces of the old French influence, where certain rents are spoken of as due to the Trinity Friars from ground "*in vico de la Grene*"—that is "in the Green-gate,"† and in yet another, of 1477, we have a similar reference to land "*in vico de ly Grene*."‡ It is unnecessary to multiply instances. Throughout these older documents it is the same. The street is never spoken of in terms equivalent to "the Green," but always as "the way of the Green," or the Green-gate. It never was the grassy space, or burgh green, which its present and long familiar name might lead one to suppose. It was a main highway, the entry to the burgh, before even the erection of the Bridge of Dee gave a fixed direction to the southern approach. To the burghers themselves it was the only means of getting to the grassy flat near by, with which it was closely associated, and whose designation, probably on that very account, it gradually assumed.


*Records of Marischal College, I., p. 16, n.

†Extracts from Council Register (Sp. Club), I., p. 6.

‡Ibid., I., p. 5.

THE GREEN.

II.

T is not easy to carry one's-self back through the seven centuries that have elapsed since William the Lion gave his "palace" in the Green to the Trinity Friars, whence arose the Trinity Monastery and Chapel, the most notable historical institution in this quarter of the town. King William was nearing the end of his long reign when, about 1211, he made this pious donation. He had already granted several charters to the burgh—the first we have*—and about this time, we are told, although there is some reason to believe it belongs to a rather earlier date, he estab-

* All admirably rendered in Mr. P. J. Anderson's *Charters and Other Writs Illustrating the History of Aberdeen*. It is worth noting that in a charter granted by William the Lion in Aberdeen, about A.D. 1200, occur the first names of any Aberdonians on record, witnesses to the deed, viz.—"William, son of Norman, William, son of Hugh, and Gilbert, son of Joceline, burgesses of Aberdeen." *Book of Bon-Accord*. App., p. 351. The names suggest that of the many Englishmen who were settled in the towns of Scotland at that time, usually carrying on most of the trade, Aberdeen had its share, and that these southron burgesses held the highest positions.

lished a mint in Aberdeen in the street still familiarly known as Exchequer Row.* In any case, he set up the monastery of the Trinity Friars in the days when it was becoming clearer to devout minds that the true sphere of the church's work was not in lonely and retired regions but in the heart of the busy community. And there, for three hundred and fifty years, being well endowed, and drawing their revenues from property in the neighbouring country and from fishings in the Dee and Don, as well as from the more precarious donations of the charitable, they carried on their work unobtrusively. In the fulness of time they were swept away. They must, in some way, have occasioned resentful feelings on the part of the citizens of Aberdeen, for at the Reformation the convent of the Trinity Friars was set on fire, and part of the buildings destroyed. One of the friars, Brother Francis, in attempting to make his escape, was stabbed, and his body thrown into the fire and burnt. "This was the only instance of any act of personal violence being committed upon any of those friars by the people."†

Even after the Reformation the history of the Trinity Chapel and Monastery is full of interest. It was held by various private persons, in life-rent from

*Several specimens of the productions of the Aberdeen Mint are fortunately preserved in the city, in the collection of coins in Robert Gordon's College. They will be found Nos. 201—Groat of David II., 206—A half groat; 222—Penny of Robert III., in the glass case in the Board Room of the College.

†Kennedy. *Annals*, II., p. 68.

the Crown, up to 1631,* when it was purchased by the noted Dr. William Guild, "with all the lands, houses, rents, revenues, rights and privileges belonging thereto."† Almost immediately afterwards, Dr. William Guild gifted the property to the Aberdeen Trades, of which his father, Matthew Guild, armourer, had been a prominent member, and Trinity Hall was the meeting-place of the craftsmen—who also worshipped in Trinity Chapel—for over two hundred years.

One word as to Dr. Guild. He was at this time one of the city ministers—predecessor of another remarkable personage, Rev. Andrew Cant—and afterwards Principal of King's College. The unbiassed person, seeking truth, will have some difficulty, in spite of all that has been written regarding him, in arriving at a just estimate of his character and work. Spalding assailed him virulently as one out of whom no good could come, and Joseph Robertson set him down as a local vicar of Bray, "a vain, weak man, with no constancy of principle, a writer of many volumes of little note, and indebted to his wealth and ostentatious charity for a reputation which neither his learning nor talents would have gained."‡ On the other hand, these substantial charities have found him

*In the early years of that century an ineffectual attempt was made by the Town Council to purchase the Trinity property for the town.

†Bain. Merchant and Craft Guilds, p. 154.

‡Book of Bon-Accord, p. 159.

many apologists,* but it can not be said that they have succeeded in presenting to us either a very great or a very engaging personality. Perhaps it does not matter. The Incorporated Trades do well to revere his memory, for if faithfulness be the greatest virtue, surely gratitude comes near to it ; the general community will have a lasting memorial of him so long as Guild Street endures, with Trinity Quay and Trinity Street in the neighbourhood of his best remembered benefaction.

The Trinity property, after it passed from the hands of the Trinity Friars, was turned to curious purposes. For years, the churchyard appears to have been used as a sort of common refuse ground for the district, until, in 1606, the Town Council

“Ordinas all those qho has laid middingis in the said kirkyaird or thairabout, to remove and tak away the same within ancht dayes efter the dait heiroy vnder paine of ane vnlaw of fyve merkis.”

* See particularly Dr. James Shirreff's "Inquiry into the life, writings, and character of Rev. Dr. William Guild," 1798 ; 2nd ed. 1799. Thom's "History," vol. II. Also, in recent days, Dr. Alexander Walker in "Disblair"; and Bain, "Merchant and Craft Guilds." Dr. Guild's father, the armourer, or "sward slipper," as an old chronicler calls him, was a man of substance in the community, who also experienced some tragedy in his family. Dr. Guild was the second William among his sons, the first William having been slain in a brawl in 1584, two years before the future Doctor of Divinity was born ("Sum Notabill Thinges," p. 20). Again, "John russel, servand to Mathow Guil, sward slipper in Aberdeen, and John Collison, baxter in Aberdeen, passit to the se syd to haife wyshin thayme, and perissat bath, the 26 day of July, the yeir of God, 1578 yeris" (Ibid. p. 16).

This injunction was issued in order that the churchyard might be utilised for the purposes of a ship-building yard. At that time the ground was washed by the waters of the river estuary,* and a beginning was being made with the building of ships in Aberdeen. The person who had undertaken the building of a vessel in that year had been looking about him, and hit upon the churchyard as the fittest place for the work. Accordingly, the Town Council was approached, and

"The samyn day, anent the bill geivin in by Alexander Davidson, tymber man in Sanct Androise, mackand mentioun that he has agreet with the honest men that hes bocht the Wod of Drum for als mekill tymber as will big ane bark quhilk bark he intendis, God willing, to big within this towne, and because the kirkyard of the Trinitie Freris, quhilk is filthilie abusit be middingis, is the maist meit and convenient place for bigging of the said bark he humblie desyred for sic service as he micht do to the town, that he may have licence and guidwill of that towne for bigging of the said bark, seing the tymber is redie in one flott to cum to this burght as at mair lenth was contenit in his said bill; quhairanent the prouest, baillies, and counsall advysing, they fund the desire thair of verie reasonable, and grantit and gaive licence to the said Alexr. Davidsoun to big his ship in the pairt foresaid, viz. — in the said Trinitie Freris Kirkyaird."†

Alexander Davidson duly built his "schip," though in a leisurely way, for he was three years over his contract, and when it was completed this earliest of

* One cannot take it, however, that, as Walter Thom gravely remarks, "the Dee overflowed the Green." *History*, I., p. 34.

† Bain, pp. 156-7.

the vessels of the port of Aberdeen was appropriately named the "Bon-Accord."*

On passing into the hands of the Trades, in 1633, the Trinity buildings were reconstructed, and an Hospital for "decayed craftsmen" established as a part of the Trades equipment. About this time was erected the very quaintly designed and inscribed gateway to the Trinity Hall of the old days, which was rebuilt into the present Trinity Hall, on the Denburn level, a curiously interesting architectural relic. Unfortunately, within the last few years, in order that that part of the building might be utilised as shops or stores, the old gateway was demolished, and only the inscribed scroll work on the upper part remains, an isolated fragment above the main staircase in the inside of the hall. The Trinity Chapel continued to be used for worship, sometimes by a preacher engaged by the Trades, sometimes by one who rented it as an independent venture. In 1703, at the time when according to a slighting observation of Wodrow, the Episcopalians were "setting up very busily in the north,"† a request was made to the Trades by a body of Episcopalians in Aberdeen, "inclyned and desirous to have ane Episcopall meeting within the town," for the use of the chapel, and it was granted accordingly to "Rev. Mr. George Farquhar, Episcopal

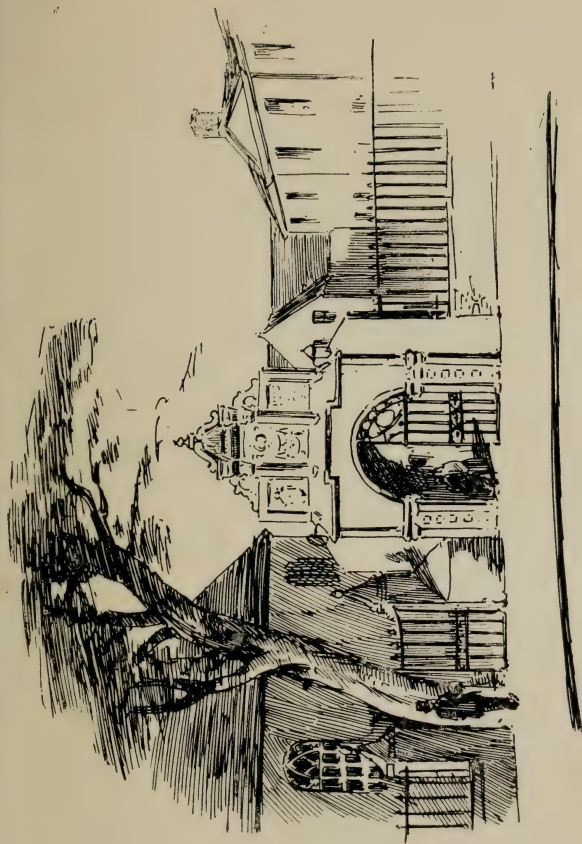
* "Item, 28th of Julii [1609] at command of the prouest and bailzeis, to Alexr. Davidsone, tymmerman, maister of wark to the new schip callit the Bonacord, the tym of gyffing hir the name, 13 lib. 6s. 8d." Dean of Guild's Accounts: Sp. Club Miss., v., p. 85.

† Wodrow. Letter to Rev. Alex. M'Cracken. Corr. I., p. 30.

minister in Aberdeen," on a small annual rent. Mr. Farquhar and his "meeting" continued in the use of the chapel for a good many years. In 1732, when the West Church of St. Nicholas was abandoned, prior to its being rebuilt, the Town Council attempted to come to an arrangement with the Trades "for the use of their chappell for two months or thereby until they deliberate where to settle."* The Trades were willing enough, if Mr. Farquhar and his hearers were provided for. But this proved an insuperable difficulty, and so the Council found it necessary to repair the Greyfriars Church for the displaced congregation of the West Church—to be occupied, not for two months, but for twenty-three years, for the West Church, reconstructed as it now stands, to plans by James Gibb, or Gibbs, Aberdeen's most eminent architect, was not opened till 9th November, 1755.

In those days the Trinity Chapel had its bellman—who was also the attendant of the chief officials of the Trades on Sundays—who got fourteen shillings (Scots) for ringing the Trinity bell on such an occasion as the burial of a Provost of the town, but, as the account books show, "only seven shillings Scots for ringing the trinity bell upon the accompt of friemens' funerals." Naturally, members of the crafts would be entitled to a reduction on the charge. But the bell was in use in other than those funereal occasions. In 1706, James Young, the bellman, was paid £1 9s. (Scots) for ringing "ye trinity bell" on the birthday of Queen Anne; and in the same year fourteen

* Council Register, LX., p. 260.



Old Gateway to Trinity Hall.

shillings was paid him for ringing the bell "for Marleborrow's victorie." That carries one back to great events, and gives a glimpse of the burgh sharing in the national rejoicing. But difficult times were in store. In the Rebellion year of 1715, David Cruickshank, who had just been appointed bellman in room of James Young, deceased, was paid fourteen shillings "for ringing the bell at King George's Proclamatione," and it may have been a desire to maintain a strict neutrality that led the cautious craftsmen to pay their bellman a similiar amount "for ringing the bell at proclaiming King James." In addition to the churchyard, the ground of the Trinity Monastery included a "kell-yaird," usually farmed out, and a flower and fruit garden which the Trades found some difficulty in guarding against the "Young Aberdeen" of two centuries ago, so that it was sometimes needful to pay for watching the fruit in Trinity yard for nine weeks on end.

But we must hasten to an end with the story of the Trinity Monastery. By a decree of the Magistrates, of 18th March, 1715, burying in the Trinity Churchyard was prohibited. In 1731, the Trades disposed of the growing timber in the Trinity grounds, "together with the big ash tree in the flower yard." In 1780, the chapel was still in use as an Episcopal meeting house, for Francis Douglas tells us that, at that time, "it is rented from the incorporated trades by an episcopal clergyman, who has no payment, but depends for his living upon the seat rents and collections at the door. It is" (adds Douglas) "a long,

narrow house, with nothing curious in it.”* But the Trinity Chapel was at its last stage. In 1794, when a secession took place from the East Parish Church, the chapel was taken over by the dissatisfied portion of the congregation. The historic old building was demolished, and on its site was erected, as a Chapel of Ease, the low, black building still standing, which has done duty for many years near the foot of Market Street as the Alhambra Music Hall. In due time the Trades themselves began to feel the necessity of a change from the old quarters, and they turned their attention to the recently laid out Union Street as a suitable site for their new home. In 1825, they got plans prepared of a “splendid hall, with other requisite accommodation,”† but it was not till 1846 that the new building was actually realised. Like the old place, it is known as Trinity Hall, and one may find there many mementoes of the Trinity Monastery and Chapel. Not the least interesting of these is the old bell—twice recast since then—which rang for “Marleborrow’s victorie,” and the proclamation of the Pretender as “King James.”

The Carmelite Monastery adjoined the grounds of the Trinity Monastery on the south side of the Green. We have a memorial of it in the name of Carmelite Street, which was formed in 1794 on the ground that served as the garden of the Carmelite Friars. Although half a century later than the Trinity Friars in coming to Aberdeen, the Carmelites appear to have soon

* A General Description of the East Coast, p. 90.

† *Aberdeen Journal*, 14th December, 1825.

acquired some celebrity, for when King Edward I. of England visited Aberdeen, early in the fourteenth century, he sent four of the Carmelites to have the degree of Doctor of Divinity conferred on them by Balliol College, Oxford.* Then the charters of grants to the order in early days are comparatively numerous. The Carmelites enjoyed an annuity of ten merks from the town revenues by a grant, in 1325, of Robert the Bruce, who had been a neighbour of theirs in the Green in the days when he resided in Aberdeen after the disastrous battle of Methven. They had various donations, confirmed by charter of David II., from residents in the burgh, and one is of special interest, for as a charter of the Trinity Monastery gave us the first recorded names of Aberdonians, this one of the Carmelites gives us the earliest recorded names of Aberdeen magistrates. There were four of them, even then, and their names were Baillies Ricardus Cementarius,† Walterus de Malmuth, Duncanus de Lessel, and Thomas, filius Alici. Unfortunately, we do not get with these the name of the Provost—or Alderman, as he was called up to 1446—but it is in another grant to the Carmelites that we get also the first recorded name of a Provost of the burgh. It is a grant of 1284, and one of the witnesses is “Alderman Malcolmus de Polgonie,” whose relationship to

* Kennedy. *Annals*, II., p. 74.

† Ricardus Cementarius, or, Richard the Mason, was a builder in town. He was paid twenty merks out of the royal treasury in 1264 for repairs made on the Castle of Aberdeen. *Exchequer Rolls*, I., p. 12.

the property of Balgownie it would be interesting to trace if it did not lead us so far afield. Still another grant to the Carmelites of various pieces of land and tenements in the Broadgate was made by a well-to-do burgess of Aberdeen, John Crab, in 1349. His name is perpetuated in a curious way. It was Crab's stone, as pointed out by Mr. A. M. Munro, a march stone on Crab's property near the Justice Mills, that gave the name to the battle, and frightful massacre of Aberdonians, in 1644. It was the second battle of the Crabstone, but the first was merely an encounter between two families and their retainers, whereas the victory of Montrose and his wild Irish allies was long remembered with terror by the whole community.*

But the Carmelites, although mendicants, possessed much property beyond the bounds of Aberdeen. They owned, for example, the Friars' Glen, in Drumtochty, which was gifted to them by Fraser of Fren-draught in 1402. They continued to draw the revenues of the Glen down till the Reformation. In due time it was acquired by the Earl Marischal, who gifted it to Marischal College; from the College it passed, by purchase, about a century ago, to the then proprietor of Drumtochty. †

*Crab's Stone—Crabestone—is still to be seen at a stable door in Hardgate. It has doubtless been well enough preserved till now, but it seems too valuable as a historical relic to be left to the charge of private persons—unless, indeed, it be specially cared for as in the case of the "Langstane," which has some claim to be regarded also as a Crab's stone.

†Jervise. *Memorials of Angus and Mearns*, I., p. 145.

The story of the Friars' Glen is, in some measure, the story of all the possessions of the Carmelite Monastery about Aberdeen. They fell to the Crown at the Reformation, and were afterwards acquired by the founder of Marischal College, and made part of the endowment of the College. A portion of the extensive garden of the Carmelite Friars belonged in the middle of the seventeenth century to Marjorie Jameson, one of the daughters of George Jameson, the great artist, and Britain's first eminent portrait painter, whose house in the Schoolhill has been only recently demolished. Marjorie added part of the income from this piece of ground also to the revenues of Marischal College.* Although, however, they lost their property, the Carmelite Friars were to be found in the streets of Aberdeen for many years after the Reformation. The public mind may sometimes have turned back with some longing to the old order of things, and we know that the City Fathers were not unsympathetic, for as late as 1616 the Town Council gives orders that Richard Garden, sometime one of the Trinity Friars, is to receive his board daily among the honest men of the town, "especially the Members of the Council," till otherways provided for.† But even the Carmelites passed away, and but for the appropriate retention of their name in a street name

* "Item, twentie one merks and a halfe from the relict of Mr John Alexander Marjorie Jamieson out of the gairden in the grein callit the Carmelite freirs gairden." Records of Marischal College and University, I., p. 238.

† Council Register, xxvi., p. 701.

of the district, we should be in danger of forgetting that we had the presence of the Carmelites in Aberdeen for three hundred and fifty years. One remembers the briefly awakened interest in the subject that took place in June of 1891, when, in the course of some digging operations in Carmelite Lane, the workmen came upon part of the old Carmelite burial place. The quantity of bones disclosed on that occasion (without the slightest trace of coffin or enclosing material of any kind) indicated the considerable use that had been made of the Carmelite cemetery. On the same occasion a portion of the old Carmelite Chapel was brought to light—the lower part of a buttress, of Morayshire sandstone. Although a mere fragment, it was enough to show that the Carmelites, as well as others of the monks of the neighbourhood, had a right taste in architecture as well as a true spirit of worship before the looseness and levity crept in which brought their inevitable and destroying result.

THE GREEN.

III.



PERSON standing near the fountain, in the Green, looking westward, has on his right hand a long line of very high buildings, the result of the construction of Union Street at a sufficiently high level to meet the high ground that lay west of the Denburn valley. The formation of Union Street at such a height, close to, and practically parallel with, the Green, naturally altered greatly the appearance of the Green on that side, much more so, indeed, than the present generation can very easily appreciate. The dwellings along there, up to the close of the eighteenth century, were of low height, so that there was a freedom, so to speak, between the Green and, say, the Woolmanhill, or between the Green and St. Nicholas Church, that is now wholly wanting. One may judge of this, to some extent, from the level of the Correction Wynd, so called from the House of Correction that was established there in the year 1636 "for all idle persons and vagabonds able to work."* The Correction Wynd is the only street now in use that cut into the Green

* Council Register, LVII., p. 850.

on the north side prior to the formation of Union Street. But the same idea may, perhaps, be better understood when it is remembered that the small recess, as it now is, paved with rough cobble stones, leading from the foot of the Back Wynd stair to the Green, is really a small portion of the Back Wynd itself, which ran straight into the Green, before the great undertaking of Union Street was carried over it, at a height of thirty feet or so, cutting off this small tail-end of it. This explains why it is that the small houses still to be seen in the recess face that way, being really the houses of the Back Wynd; and it explains also the really correct, though sometimes not easily understood, designation of the stair which was constructed not opposite to—as is often supposed—but actually in the Back Wynd. From this it will be easy to understand the topographical references in the following narrative of a tragic incident from an Aberdeen periodical of the year 1787, which would otherwise be somewhat puzzling—

“Yesterday morning a horse coming down the Windmill Brae, drawing a cart of peats, took fright, and ran furiously into the Green. At the end of the Back Wynd a woman was standing with an infant in her arms and a child of about three years of age at her foot. The cart went over them, and killed the child on the spot, the wheel going over its head. The woman was carried to the Infirmary speechless, in which condition she still remains. The infant, luckily, received little or no hurt.”*

**Northern Gazette*, 30th August, 1787. It is, of course, to be noted that the maps of Aberdeen, prior to 1800, show the Back Wynd continued into the Green.



The Old Well in the Corbie Haugh.

For some years after the formation of Union Street, and until the feus between what is now Market Street and Union Bridge were built upon, anyone passing along the pavement on the south side of Union Street had the Green under view, and could almost look down the chimneys of the line of low buildings that lay alongside Union Street on that side. Indeed, it was a favourite recreation of the rowdies of the town in the opening years of last century to annoy the good people in these houses of the Green by throwing offensive matter into their dwellings by the chimney. We read that in 1807, by the authority of the Magistrates, a reward of five guineas was offered for the detection of "certain idle and disorderly persons [who] have for some time past been in the practice of convening in Union Street in the dusk of the evenings and throwing stones, bricks, and other missiles, whereby passengers are apt to receive hurt and damage."* So the dwellers in the Green would be specially interested in the feuing out of Union Street, even if it meant in more than one sense the obliteration of their own neighbourhood.

The formation of Union Street has just been spoken of as a great undertaking. It was more than that. The scheme, of which the formation of Union Street formed a chief part, was, although not the most costly, really the most statesmanlike undertaking ever carried out by the rulers of Aberdeen, for it operated then and afterwards in the way of opening out the streets as a whole to the fresh, healthful air of

* *Aberdeen Journal*, 28th October, 1807.

heaven, and it has conferred lasting distinction on the appearance of the city. But one trembles almost to think how nearly the town came to having a scheme of a very different kind put upon it. It was the Green that was to remain the great highway of the city westwards, and property was actually being purchased in the Windmill Brae in order to the widening and improving of the Windmill Brae as part of the leading thoroughfare.

It was in the years 1780 to 1782 that the proposal took shape to form a new and better approach to the city on the west side. Up to that time, as previously pointed out, all traffic from the south and west passed down the Windmill Brae and along the Green, thence by narrow and tortuous alleys got itself distributed somehow through the town. Between the Green and the Castlegate rose St. Katharine's Hill, on which the chapel, dedicated to St. Katharine, stood till the latter half of the sixteenth century.* For many years the hill was an insuperable barrier to street improvement in the town. By 1782, however, the authorities were prepared to face the question of carrying a new street from the Green up through the properties that fringed St. Katharine's Hill, and through the hill itself to the Narrow Wynd—the short street that occupied the site of Union Street between the top of Shiprow and the Castlegate. A committee was

* In 1541 a dispute arose between the magistrates and the chaplain, "Sir" John Cuming, over the closing up of a passage leading to the chapel from the Green, which dragged its weary length over sixteen years.

appointed to consider the scheme, which was favourably regarded generally, for it was perfectly clear that something must be done, and the committee reported that the scheme could be carried out for something over £2000.* Some years passed in seemingly fruitless talk, but really in most profitable delay and quiet consideration. The scheme became lively again in 1793, and in that year a rig of land was purchased for £600 in the Windmill Brae for the purposes of the improvement. But in 1797 came inspiration, and the resolution to construct the new street, not by way of the Green, but through the shoulder of St. Katharine's Hill to the Dove Cot Brae, the top of the Denburn "precipice," as Francis Douglas called it, and thence westward. From that time the right scheme progressed, through much opposition, taxation, and the bankruptcy of the city over it, to the wonderful success which, through familiarity, has become a common-place in later days.

From the moment that the Union Street scheme was mentioned, the Green became important only in a historical sense. In that respect, however, its supremacy among the streets of the city, with a single exception, must remain unapproached. For never can any single street be again the scene of either the historic events that have been enacted there, or of such a marvellous procession of notabilities, from kings and queens downward, as passed along the Green in the seven centuries prior to 1800.

In the days when Montrose's merciless "Irishes"

* Council Register, LXIV., p. 242.

swept through the Green on their destroying way, after the Crabstone rout, the dwellings in the quarter were poor and mean, not in any sense to be compared to the class of houses in the Castlegate, the Gallowgate, or the Guestrow—in many cases constructed partly of “divots,” which was the material generally in use for fencing the gardens. And, if one may judge from Baillie Court and Session records, the character of the inhabitants was scarcely higher than the quality of the dwellings. On one occasion, in 1531, twenty-two persons were banished from the town for a year and a day for their demerits. Among them was “Lady” Low, in the Green, with all her household, the doors of the house being ordered to be closed up, and Lady Low was cautioned to be on her good behaviour, as one would say in these days, for seven years on pain of being burned on the cheek with a hot iron.* But Lady Low returned within the year, when she was burned on the underside of the hand with a hot iron, and again banished, under pain of being drowned in a sack.† Even this was not enough, for once more, within the year, this persistent lady appeared in the streets of the burgh. She was not drowned. But she was burned with a hot iron on the cheeks, crowned with paper, as was the manner in shameful cases, and again banished for seven years and a day “in presence of two Baillies.”‡ And that had the desired effect. No doubt, many a respectable, hard-working “wobster,”

* Council Register, XIII., p. 258.

† Ibid., XIII., p. 271.

‡ Ibid., XIII. p. 461.

"litster," or "pewterer"* plied his craft in the Green, but although it was the principal entrance to the town, it was a somewhat squalid thoroughfare, hardly saved even by its historical associations.

Although the scheme for cutting a new street through St. Katharine's Hill between the Town House and the Green was so fortunately superseded by the Union Street scheme, the district lying between the points mentioned was greatly modified as the construction of Union Street went on in the opening years of last century. At length it was completely changed in appearance by the construction of Market Street and the New Market, and both undertakings naturally affected the Green. It is very curious that, like Union Street, the formation of Market Street was very nearly mismanaged. A new street to the south, by way of the river side, was spoken of in Aberdeen as early as the proposed new street to the west of the town. The matter languished, however, until about 1820, when it began to be a topic of public interest. But the popular idea was that it should run southwards from Union Street at a point some fifty yards or so west of where it actually is.

"The line best adapted for this purpose [of the new street] would commence at a point in Union Street about mid-

*In 1887, Mr. Gladstone showed much interest in the circumstance that a George Gladstaines, pewterer, one of the family probably "planted out," as he said, had lived in Aberdeen in 1656. But he was not nearly the first. More than a century and a half before, in 1501, St. Katharine's altar drew five shillings of rent "from the land of William Andirson, in the Green, lying near the land of Thomas Gladstane." Chartulary, I., p. 51; II., p. 43. Then we have evidence of a Johannes Gledstane as a resident in the city in 1408. Charters, etc., p. 314.

way between the properties of Mr. Hay and Mr. Lyall, and crossing Puttachieside and the Malt Mill Bridge would reach the quay a little to the southward of Trinity Hall.”*

So nearly was this scheme being carried into effect, that one of the plans of Aberdeen published some years after this date actually shows Market Street completed according to this proposal. The genius of Archibald Simpson, however, saved the situation, and Market Street, as it now is, was constructed between 1840 and 1842 in what anyone can now see to be the perfect situation in relation to the other streets in the neighbourhood. If it were not strictly accurate that, as a curious and scarce Aberdeen “Guide” of fifty years ago put it, the formation of Market Street “superseded a great number of houses in the upper part of the Green,”† that actually happened on the construction of the New Market—also the work of Simpson—which was opened with its great promenade concert on 29th April, 1842.

It was very shortly after this, in 1852, that the old familiar fountain in Castle Street was removed from its site there and re-erected in the position it still occupies, on the site of a former well near the back entrance to the New Market in the Green. This is one of the really artistic constructions to be found in the streets of Aberdeen, of the kind one expects to come across rather in a quaint, old, Continental town, and it is worth a moment’s notice. The statuette

* *Aberdeen Journal*, 26th October, 1825.

† *Stranger’s Guide to Aberdeen*, 1851, p. 33.

that surmounts the fountain is one of the few, and finest, specimens of artistic lead work to be found in the city. Archibald Courage, amid much in his "Survey," of 1853, that is hardly to be taken seriously, records what may arouse the wonder of younger readers—

"The ornamental well, crowned with a very neat statue which you see in the centre of the Green, has been lately removed from the east end of Castle Street. By the ingenuity of Mr. Cruickshank, the Inspector of Police, on turning the handle of the well in one direction you have spring water, and on turning it to the other you have river water. Which of them is preferable for making toddy we have not learned—perhaps either of them would be better without the ardent. From the head of the statue, and from the mouths of the grotesque heads on the corners, jets of water are made to play on occasions of public rejoicings."*

This was the first public well erected in Aberdeen in connection with the first regular water supply introduced into the city. Prior to the eighteenth century, the public obtained water in various ways—from the burns, when these were in condition, from the loch, from "draw" wells, or the springs that issued in the Corbie Haugh, Carden's Haugh, in St. John's Croft, near Hardweird—whence St. John's Well, restored and inscribed, as we now know it, in 1852—or from the well dedicated to St. Mary, near the street named from it Marywell Street, or from the Spa Well, the most celebrated of them all. But sometimes many of these sources failed of their supply. The town had,

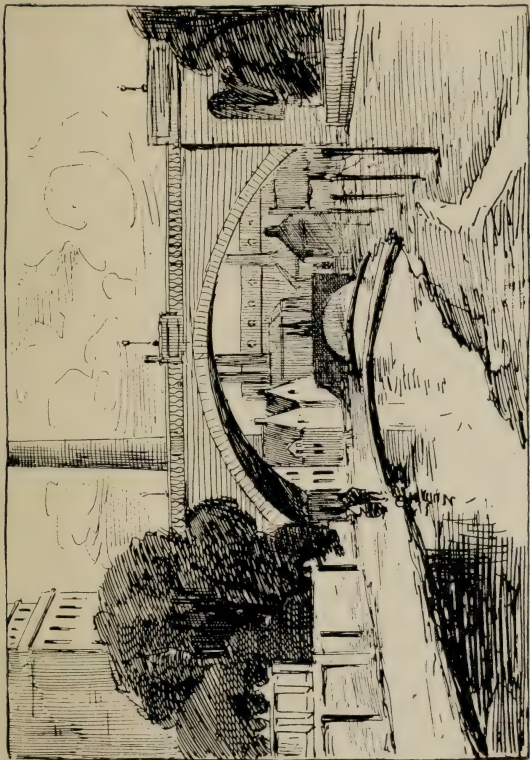
* *A Brief Survey of Aberdeen*, p. 10.

in consequence, to resort to curious devices, and we find in the middle of the seventeenth century water being distributed in the streets of Aberdeen by licensed water carriers, who paid ten merks yearly for the privilege of doing so, and evidently found it worth their while.* A new era was inaugurated, however, in a modest way, in 1706, when leaden pipes were laid down and the water of Carden's Well carried into town to the fountain erected in the Castlegate, now in the Green. At that time the Town Council appointed a water overseer, William Lindsay, by name, a goldsmith, who was also made overseer of the armaments of the town in the rebellion of 1715.† Lindsay was a person of some artistic taste, and with him the Town Council contracted in 1708 "anent his making patterns of a statue of three foot and a half high," of brass, for the fountain, with four antique faces for the corners of the same.‡ But in 1710, as the brass statue was not forthcoming, it was arranged that Lindsay should meantime put up a wooden figure; and in due time the lead figure was set up which remains in position till this day. The well did service in Castle Street for a century and a half, and

* Selected Writings of John Ramsay, p. 340.

† The writer is told by a member of the Incorporated Trades that William Lindsay was a prominent member of the Hammermen Trade, by whom his name is perpetuated, in Lindsay Street, near Golden Square. This needs confirmation, however, as the streets in that quarter were not formed until many years after the time of Lindsay, the water overseer.

‡ Extracts from Council Register (Burgh Rec. Soc.), II. p. 338.



The Last "Bow Brig."

one may hope that it will remain a picturesque feature of the Green for many a long day to come.

The transference of the fountain in 1852 was almost contemporaneous with the removal of the most familiar feature in the Green quarter, the "Bow Brig." All arched bridges were "bow" bridges, and the arched ports, or gates, of the city were themselves known colloquially as the "bows" of the town; but this was the "Bow Brig" beyond all, so styled in official documents, and sung in poetry, as, for example, by William Anderson, author of "*Jean Findlater's Loon*," and other pieces of real merit, himself born in the Green, within a stone-throw of the bridge. For many years the Bow Brig was both a local landmark and an architectural feature in the district—"a handsome bridge of one arch, thrown over a rivulet called the Denburn," says Douglas,* and for older residents especially enshrouded in most interesting associations.

The Bow Brig being, in a sense, the limit of the burgh, was the point at which for centuries distinguished visitors were received. The Lords of Justiciary, for example, on visiting the town for the Circuit Court, were met by the Magistrates "at the Bowbridge, for the conveying of them to their lodgings."† In the case of some royal visitors, of course, and certain others whom the burghers specially delighted to honour, the reception took place as far out as the Bridge of Dee; as time wore on, indeed, the Justices, also, were often met there,

* *A General Description of the East Coast*, p. 70.

† Extracts from Council Register (Burgh Rec. Soc.), II. p. 273.

and the arrangement led to certain abuses on which an economical Town Council, of 1750, determined to put down its foot. Thus, on 23rd September, of that year,

“The said day the Council, considering that there had been a needless expense laid out for these several years bygone in Entertaining part of the Company after Riding the Land Marches, and also after Meeting and Convoing the Lords of Justiciary, They therefore Prohibit and Discharge the Dean of Guild in anytime coming from Entertaining any of the Company after Riding the Land Marches. And in case the gentlemen that go out to meet the Lords of Justiciary should stop at any publick house waiting their coming, that then the Dean of Guild may give them a Moderate Glass, but he is not to entertain them after they come to Town, Only in case they drink not a glass in the Country they may get a Moderate Glass in Town.”*

It will be remembered that it was to the Bow Brig that the woollen manufacturers of Aberdeen went in the old days to meet the crowds of country people with their wares, for, at that time, people in the country round about found as much profit in knitting stockings for Aberdeen, for delivery at the Bow Brig on Fridays, as their successors do in the matter of dairy produce for the Friday market. To the Bow Brig the citizens resorted to secure early a supply of the fir roots so coveted for the heating and lighting of the dwellings of the town, and so greatly in demand that the Baillie Courts of the rural Baronies, on the one hand, and the Magistrates of Aberdeen, on the

* Council Register, LXI., p. 484.

other, had to pass stringent regulations against unlawful "holling" of the fir, and trafficking in it beyond the Bow Brig, the Woolmanhill, or the Gallowgate port.* Then the Bow Brig was also the point of parting with civic guests, and no exception ever seemed to be taken to such an item in the Dean of Guild's accounts as, for example, related to a "quart of wine and ane breid quilk was careit to the Bow Brig at command of the magistrat at the gude-nicht taking with sum strangers of Edinburgh."†

The earliest Bow Brig was probably a wooden structure, of no character, meant merely to afford means of crossing the "rivulet called the Denburn." This is somewhat remarkable, keeping in view the glory of the church in bridge building in the middle centuries, and the admirable specimens of Churchmen's work that remain to us in the Bridge of Dee and the Old Bridge of Don. One cannot help feeling that we have in this an example of the sturdy independence of the civic rulers who would tolerate the action of no other authority, even in bridge building, within their own municipal jurisdiction. In any case, the early Bow Brig was clearly of mean quality. About the middle of the sixteenth century we read of repairs on the Bridge of Don and other structures being carried out by "masonys," but we have no record of masons being employed in any repairs on the Bow

* See especially the Baillie Court books of the Baronies of Skene, and Leys; also the enactments, in the seventeenth century, against "forestalling," *i.e.* "corners" among the citizens.

†Accounts for 1616. Miss. Sp. Club, v., p. 95.

Brig.”* It is in 1556 that we reach the period of a Bow Brig of real merit, and it is then specifically laid down that the new bridge then about to be built, must be a bridge of stone and lime.”

“2nd Jan. 1556—The said day, the haill toun being conuenit within the tolbutht, thocht neidfull and expedient to big ane brig upoun the Den Burne at the south wast entre of the toune, as thai cum thairto fra the brig of Dee, and ordanis Maister Robert Lumisden, maister of vark of the brig of Dee, to big the said brig of twa bowis, sufficiently with stane and lyme, with the reddiest of the money that he hes of the mailis [rents] of Ardlar, and to by stanis, lyme, and all materiallis neidfull therto; and quhat he disbursis on the the biging of the said brig to be thankfully allowit to him in his nixt compt.”†

This scheme of a bridge of “twa bowis” does not seem to have given entire satisfaction, for in thirty years a proposal is being discussed to construct a bridge of one arch—“the haill toun grantit and consentit that the bow brig be biggit and erectit with ane bow of estlair”‡ No doubt the difficulty which did ultimately lead to the substitution of a one-arch bridge was early felt, namely, the obstruction of the double arches to the stream in spate, but the change was not at this time effected, and the Bow Brig of two arches endured for almost exactly two hundred years. In that period, of how many remarkable events was it not a silent witness? Over the bridge, a very few

* “Item, for mending of the bryg at the grene ende in all costis, 1 lib. 2s. 6d.” Accounts, 1453. Miss. Sp. Club, v., p. 48.

† Extracts from Council Register, (Sp. Club.), I., p. 294.

‡ Ibid., II., p. 59.

years after its erection, marched the Magistrates and the body of citizens in armour who, at the Crabstone and other points outside the town, so valiantly withstood the Laird of Balquhain and his fifty horsemen.* Two years later James VI. and his Privy Council clatter over the Bow Brig, on the occasion of the "Affair of the Bridge of Dee," when the king held court in Aberdeen over the insurrection of Huntly, Erroll, and the other Catholic lords;† and three years afterwards, in 1592, James is back again, received by the Magistrates at the Bridge of Dee, and convoyed into town over the Bow Brig to receive the puncheon of old Bordeaux, sweetmeats, and spiceries "as was customary."‡ And so the picturesque record runs—the King and Privy Council in Aberdeen again, in 1594, over the affair of the battle of Glenlivet, issuing proclamations and taking cautions for a month on end§; and once more, in 1600, first King James, and a few months afterwards the Queen, over the Bow Brig again, the last of the royal visits prior to the union of the crowns. But though royal interests centred henceforth mainly in the far south, these were not the last of the royal visitors, and many besides quite as notable crossed the bridge in the course of its history. We have Montrose entering in many a different capacity, both before and during the stormy period of the "Trubles." Some of his visits the burghers had bitter cause to remember. Along with Montrose we

* *Sum Notabill Things.* p. 22.

† Register of Privy Council, 1st. ser. IV., pp. 400-407.

‡ Kennedy. *Annals*, I., p. 128.

§ Reg. of Privy Council, V., pp. 180-190.

have the Covenanted Commissioners crossing, in 1638, for their famous encounter with the "Aberdeen Doctors"; and in the same year we see the thin, cloaked figure of Samuel Rutherford, on horseback, hurrying with exulting heart home to his flock at Anwoth, after eighteen months of banishment among the arid intellects of Aberdeen. In 1650, Charles II. crosses the bridge on his way to the coronation at Scone, and the crushing defeat at Worcester; and from the opposite direction, forty years later, comes the Jacobite army after the victory of Killiecrankie, to annoy and harass the town.* Much passing and repassing took place over that old Bow Brig at the Union of the Parliaments, with all the royal and official communications relative to that event till, in the autumn of 1708, John Gordon, for two years previously Provost of Aberdeen, rode off to Westminster, the first elected Member of Parliament for the burghs of Aberdeen, Arbroath, Montrose, Brechin, and Bervie—elected, we are told, without solicitation, and without expense, and with £50 in his purse from his fellow citizens to meet the costs of his journey to London.† Last of all came the racing and chasing of the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745—Prince Charlie himself being one of those who rode over the Bow Brig in the later outbreak—until, in the middle of that century, the bridge itself began to give way, and the demand for a new bridge could no longer be resisted.

* Kennedy. *Annals*, I., pp. 234-5.

† Ibid., pp. 235-6.

The immediate cause of the demolition of this old bridge of two arches was the flooding of the Green, in the neighbourhood of the bridge, by the overflowing of the Denburn on 4th October, 1746. A petition by heritors and other inhabitants was put before the Town Council, maintaining that the damage was in great measure owing "to the smallness of the two arches of the Bow Bridge, which had not sufficient room to receive the charges of water coming on them."* The Town Council was easily convinced on the subject—not only so, but itself supplied the addendum that such damage was of frequent occurrence, and that accordingly a new bridge had become an imperative necessity. And a hint having been given, a plan was prepared by the most competent person in Aberdeen at that time, "John Jeans, mason," which was laid before the Council on 9th May, 1747. It showed a graceful bridge of a single arch, and being much admired, was forthwith adopted, and ordered to be carried into effect. The Council had no funds for such a purpose, but arguing that "a bridge over the Denburn is an avenue and the publick highway to the Bridge of Dee, which has sufficiency of funds for building this new bridge and supporting itself,"† the Council ordained that the cost be paid out of the Bridge of Dee funds, the Treasurer granting an obligation for himself and his successors to repay the amount if ever the Bridge of Dee funds should stand in need of it. And this arrangement,

* Council Register, LXI., p. 283.

† Ibid., LXI., p. 283.

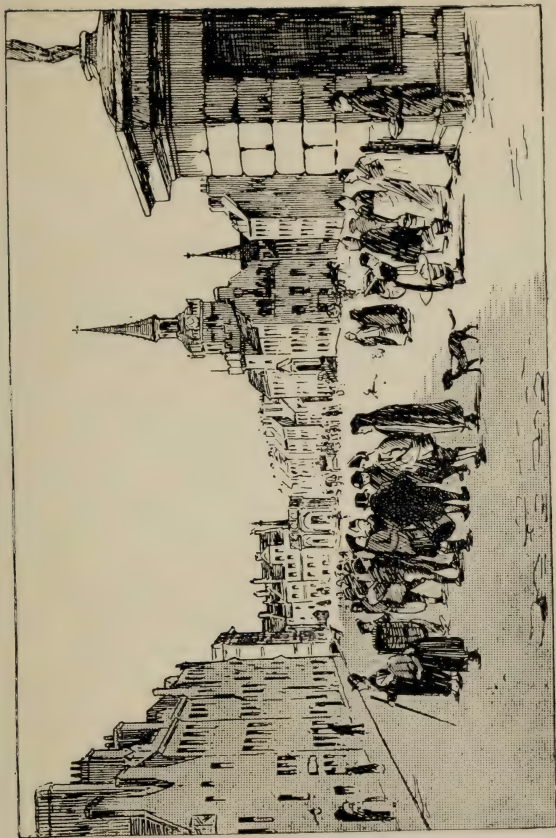
in spite of the protest of the Provost, William Chalmers, was duly carried out.

John Jeans, the architect and builder of this last of the Bow Brigs, was a man of some local note, and we are able, fortunately, to judge for ourselves of the exterior lines at least of this bridge as it stands re-erected in the Union Terrace Gardens. He was about thirty years of age when he built the Bow Brig—having already won some celebrity as the inventor of the screw stair; and twenty years afterwards, in 1770, he drew the plans for the Meal Market, which was duly constructed conform to that plan.* Most of his professional life was spent in England, but as one of the honourable line of prominent Aberdeen architects, it is well that some specimens of his work should be known in the city.†

The new bridge was duly begun in 1747, but it was not erected without exciting keen public controversy. After the foundations were laid, and the line and general appearance of the structure had become known, objections were taken to the proposed direction of the bridge, of a sufficiently serious character as to necessitate action by the Town Council. Accordingly, in August of 1747, the Council had these objections under consideration, and being of opinion that “proper judges, knowing in architecture, should be called to give their opinion,”

* Council Register, LXIII., pp. 155-161.

† Jeans died about 1804, aged about eighty. His son was drowned by falling on a dark night into the harbour, near the pier, in 1809.



The Castlegate in 1812.

nominated five gentlemen, Professor Pollock, Mr. David Verner, Dr. James Gregory, Mr. Alexander Rait, and Mr. John Thomson, to examine the foundations and plans of the bridge and give the community the benefit of their views. This was promptly done. These gentlemen, "knowing in architecture," were appointed to give their opinion on 29th August, and two days afterwards their report was submitted to the Council "That the building of the bridge should proceed conform to its present foundations."* It proceeded accordingly, and Jeans' bridge, the "Bow Brig" of familiar talk and local song and sketch, bore the burden of the incoming and outgoing traffic of Aberdeen for half-a-century. Even after the construction of Union Street and Holburn Street had rendered Hardgate and Windmill Brae of no consequence as a highway, even from the south-west, ancient habit persisted, and much of the traffic passed down the old familiar way.† At last, in 1850, to make way for the Denburn Valley railway, this old landmark had to be cleared away. It is, fortunately, preserved for us under the arches of the Union Terrace Gardens—not a great work, as things go now, but interesting to new generations as one of the architectural features of the city in the old days, and really the first undertaking in that era of extension and embellishment of the city which began after the suppression of the last Jacobite rebellion, and is still in progress.

* Council Register, LXI., pp. 297-9.

† It is curious to note, in Nicholls' picture of the Windmill Brae and Bow Brig in 1848, huxters' stalls laid out, at that late date, as in a chief thoroughfare.

Amid all these changes on what we may call the fringes of the district, the general appearance of the Green remained the same. As it diminished in civic importance it grew in historic and personal interest. One remembers, among the more curious personal references, that it was in the Green that Peter Williamson dwelt, that singular character who, kidnapped by the Aberdeen authorities, afterwards returned from the plantations, and not merely "slandered" the Baillies—as they maintained—but when tried for the "slander," both proved his case and obtained £300 damages against the astonished magistrates. Peter was one of the strangest products of the quarter. In later days, in his tavern in the Parliament House of Edinburgh, frequented and celebrated by the poet Fergusson, he must have given to the lively spirits of the capital a very curious idea of the type Aberdonian.* Fortunately, the Green produced many of a different quality. In the Green quarter local poets thrived, some of whom still exercise their singing voices; and even the long unlovely approach is not without memories of notable men, as well as of great events. We remember, for example, that in Rosebank, in the Hardgate, much of the boyhood was spent of Alexander Dyce, near relative of Dyce, the painter, the really eminent literary critic, whose monumental edition of Shakespeare held a very high place for years, and

* The Edinburgh agent of the magistrates in the action of 1758 against Peter Williamson was Walter Scott, W.S., father of Sir Walter Scott.

whose remarkable library is one of the great collections cared for by the national authorities at South Kensington. Then it was in the same line of street that John Burness, baker and book-canvasser, dwelt, the cousin of Robert Burns, who himself felt quite the great poet's share of the untowardness of fate. He was the author of "Thrummy Cap," "Sir James the Rose," and other "chap" works that circulated, in the rural districts especially, in thousands. In a miserable snowstorm he perished, at Portlethen, his body being found by men casting the snow in the road—"a few pence were found in his pockets, and his stock of books lying beside him."* He passed thence to an unmarked grave in the Spital Churchyard. Thus the Green, and its approach, had its writing men, and, like other older quarters of the town, it awakened the interest of minor poets, but, except the exquisite lyric of William Forsyth, "Bonailie, O! Bonailie," in which a reference occurs, the poetical tributes to the neighbourhood are, generally speaking, crude enough to be profitably forgotten.

From the Green and its story one parts with genuine regret. One cannot help feeling that in this small quarter of the city as many historical associations cluster together as would, so to speak, make the fortune of a whole province in any part of the New World. Perhaps, in this respect, we are in some danger of undervaluing our possessions, and it might be worth while for Aberdonians to make a trip, as it were, occasionally, to Aberdeen—to enter by the

* *Aberdeen Journal*, 18th January, 1826.

old main thoroughfare of the Windmill Brae and the Green, thence by the Shiprow, or the Wallace Nook to the Market Cross, as did many a thousand in the old days. They might note, as they went along, a battlefield here, or the site of an ancient landmark on the other hand, the line of streams and the mills they turned, the bridges and their associations, the sites of religious houses, the residences of kings, and so they might fill up

“As ’twere anew, the gaps of centuries ;
Leaving that beautiful which still was so,
And making that which was not—till the place
Became religion, and the heart ran o’er
With silent worship of the great of old.”

INDEX

- Aberdeen Alderman (Provost), first whose name is recorded, 19.
Aberdeen baillies, first whose names are recorded, 19.
Aberdeen burgesses, first whose names are recorded, 10 *n*.
Aberdeen Incorporated Trades, 15, *et seq*.
Aberdeen Journal quoted, 18, 25, 30.
Alhambra Music Hall, its original use, 18.
Anderson's *Charters and other Writs* quoted, 8, 10.
Anne, Queen, her birthday celebrated in Aberdeen, 16.

Back Wynd, its former course, 24.
Back Wynd Stair, why so named, 24.
Bain's *Merchant and Craft Guilds* quoted, 12, 14.
Balgownie, 20.
Balquhain, Laird of, withstood by the citizens, 37.
Barbour, Archdeacon, as a boy in Aberdeen, 5.
"Bon-Accord," the earliest Aberdeen-built ship, 15.
Bow Bridge, point at which distinguished visitors were received, 33; where city merchants met stocking-knitters from the country, 34; the earliest bridge, 35; the bridge of "two bowis," 1556, 36; petition for a new bridge, 39; new bridge constructed, 1747, 40-1; removed to make way for Denburn Valley Railway, 41.
Broad Street, property granted to Carmelites, 20.
Bruce, King Robert, a resident in the Green, 19.
Bulloch's *Aberdeen Three Hundred Years Ago*, 2 *n*.
Burness, John, cousin of Robert Burns, a resident in Hardgate, 43.

Cadenhead's *Aberdeen Burgh Territories*, 2 *n*.
Carden's Haugh Springs, 31.
Carden's Well, 32.
Carmelite Friars, 8, 18, *et seq*.
Carmelite Lane, archæological discoveries, 22.
Carmelite Street formed, 18.
Castle of Aberdeen repaired, 1264, 19 *n*.
Castle Street, 4, 6, 26, 28.
Castle-hill, 8.
Chalmers, W., Provost, 40.
Charles, Prince, in Aberdeen, 38.
Charles II., King, in Aberdeen, 38.
Chartulary of St. Nicholas quoted, 8, 29 *n*.
Coins of Aberdeen Mint, 11 *n*.
Corbie Haugh springs, 31.
Correction Wynd, meaning of the name, 23.
Council Register quoted, 7, 9, 16, 21, 23, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34, 39, 41.

Courage's *Brief Survey* quoted, 31.
 Covenanting Commissioners in Aberdeen, 38.
 Crabstone, battle of, 20, 28.
 Crown Street, site of Windmill, 3.

Davidson, Alex., earliest shipbuilder in Aberdeen, 14, 15 *n*.
 Dean of Guild accounts quoted, 15 *n*, 35.
 Dee, Bridge of, funds utilised for Bow Bridge, 39.
 Denburn, spanned by bridge in line of the Green, 3 ; described by Francis Douglas, 6 ; regulations anent scouring stockings, 7 *n* ; improvements of 1758, 7.
 Douglas's *Description of East Coast* quoted, 6-7, 17-18, 27, 33.
 Dove Cot Brae, 27.

East Parish Church, secession of 1794, 18.
 Edward I. and Carmelites of Aberdeen, 19.
 Episcopalian use of Trinity Chapel, 15, 16.
Exchequer Rolls of Scotland quoted, 19.
 Exchequer Row, 4, 11.

Farquhar, Rev. George, his use of Trinity Chapel, 15, 16.
 Forsyth, W., his lyric, 43.
 Fountain in Green, 30, *et seq*.
 Frederick Street, 6.
 Friars' Glen, Drumtochty, 20.
 Futtie, 8.

Gallowgate, 4, 28.
 Garden, Richard, friar, 21.
 "Gate," meaning road, or way, 4 *n*.
 Gates, or ports, of the city, 4-5.
 George I., proclamation celebrations in Aberdeen, 17.
 Gibbs, James, architect of West Parish Church, 16.
 Gladstones, early residents in Green, 29 *n*.
 Gordon, of Rothiemay, his *Description of Bothe Towns* quoted, 2, 5 ; his map of Aberdeen, 2, 4.
 Gordon, Provost, the first elected Member of Parliament for Aberdeen, 38.
 Green, the only highway to the city, 2 ; its peculiar shape, 2 ; *et seq.*, its name in older charters, 8, 9 ; how affected by formation of Union Street, 23, 27 ; some classes of residents, 28 ; how affected by formation of Market Street and erection of New Market, 29 ; the fountain erected, 30, *et seq.*, flooded in 1746, 39 ; personal associations, 42-3.
 Greyfriars Church, used for St. Nicholas congregation, 16.
 Guestrow, 28.

- Guild, Dr. W., his purchase of the Trinity property, 12 ; his character, 12-13.
Guild, Matthew, armourer, 12.
Guild Street, meaning of the name, 13.
Hardgate, a principal thoroughfare, 2 ; its importance lost, 41 ; notable residents, 42-3.
Jacobite army from Killiecrankie in Aberdeen, 38.
James VI. and Privy Council in Aberdeen, 37.
James, the Pretender, proclamation in Aberdeen, 17.
Jamesone, Marjorie, makes a grant of Carmelite property, 21.
Jeans, John, architect of the Bow Bridge, 39-40.
Jervise's *Memorials of Angus and Mearns* quoted, 20.
Justice Mills, 20.
Kennedy's *Annals of Aberdeen* quoted, 11, 19, 37, 38.
Langstane, 20 n.
Lindsay, W., water overseer, 32.
Lochlands, 6.
Low, "Lady," banished for misbehaviour, 28.
Maps of Aberdeen, showing configuration of the Green, 2.
Marischal College, acquires monastic property, 20-1 ; *Records* quoted, 9, 21.
Market Cross, its site, 5.
Market Street, its formation, 29-30.
Marlborough's victory, 1706, celebrated in Aberdeen, 17.
Marywell Street, meaning of the name, 31.
Mealmarket plans drawn by John Jeans, 40.
Milne's map of Aberdeen, 1789, 2.
Miracle plays, where held, 5, 6.
Montrose, Marquis of, in Aberdeen, 37.
Munro, A. M., and Crabstone, 20.
Narrow Wynd, 26.
Netherkirkgate, 3, 4, 5.
New Market erected, 29, 30.
North Street, 6.
Northern Gazette quoted, 24.
Paterson's map of Aberdeen, 1746, 2.
Porthill, 6.
Ports, or gates, of the city, 4-5.
Ramsay's *Selected Writings* quoted, 32.
Register of the Privy Council of Scotland quoted, 37.

- Rettie's *Aberdeen Fifty Years Ago*, 2 n.
 Riding of the marches, drinking customs, 34.
 Robbie's *Aberdeen: its traditions and history*, 2 n.
 Robertson, Joseph, his opinion of Dr. Guild, 12; *Book of Bon-Accord* quoted, 10, 12.
 Rosebank, Hardgate, residence of Alex. Dyce, Shakespearian scholar, 42.
 Rutherford, Samuel, in Aberdeen, 38.
 St. John's Croft, 31.
 St. John's Well, 31.
 St. Katharine's Chapel, 26.
 St. Katharine's Hill, 3, 4, 26, 27, 29.
 St. Nicholas Churchyard, 6.
 Scott, Walter, W.S., agent for Aberdeen Magistrates, 42 n.
Scottish Notes and Queries quoted, 5 n.
 Shipbuilding, earliest in Aberdeen, 14-15.
 Shiprow, 3, 4, 5, 26.
 Shirreffs, Dr. James, and Dr. Guild, 13 n.
 Simpson, Arch., architect, and formation of Market Street, 30.
 Spa Well, 31.
 Spalding, John, and Dr. Guild, 12.
Strangers' Guide quoted, 30.
Sum Notabill Thinges quoted, 13 n., 37.
 Taylor's map of Aberdeen, 1773, 2.
 Thom's *History of Aberdeen* quoted, 14 n; on Dr. Guild, 13 n.
 Trinity Chapel bellmen, 16-17.
 Trinity Friars, 10, *et seq.*
 Trinity Hall, 15, 18.
 Trinity Street, meaning of the name, 13.
 Union Street, effects of its formation on the Green, 25; progress of construction scheme, 26, *et seq.*
 Union Terrace Gardens, 7, 41.
 Virginia Street, 6.
 Walker, Dr. Alex., and Dr. Guild, 13 n.
 Water Carriers in Aberdeen, 32.
 Watt's *History of Aberdeen and Banff*, 2 n.
 William, the Lion, grants palace to Trinity Friars, 10.
 Williamson, Peter, a resident in the Green, 42.
 Windmill Brae, 1, 24, 26, 27, 41.
 Wodrow's *Correspondence* quoted, 15.
 Woolmanhill, 6.

